



SPSS PROFILE

Built in the FARC-controlled jungles of Colombia, the typical SPSS is a stateless vessel, less than 100 feet in length, of steel construction, with 4-5 crewmembers, and carrying up to 10 metric tons of illicit cargo for distances up to 5000 miles. DTOs design SPSS to sink themselves when they detect law enforcement thereby making contraband recovery impossible.

THE SPSS THREAT

SPSS are responsible for the movement of nearly 32% of all cocaine in the transit zone. Operating or embarking in a submersible or semi-submersible vessel without nationality and on an international voyage is a serious international problem, facilitates transnational crime, including drug trafficking and terrorism, and endangers the safety of maritime navigation and the security of the United States.

Dangerous Self-Propelled Semi-Submersibles (SPSS) Proliferating Rapidly

Over 14 Tons of Cocaine Seized in One Week from Two SPSS



United States Coast Guard
U.S. Department of Homeland Security



U.S. Coast Guard Boarding Team Escapes from Dangerous Drug Smuggling Sub with Only Minutes to Spare as it Sinks Beneath Them While Collecting Drug Evidence

Second SPSS Seizure This Week

Early on the morning of September 17, 2008 the U.S. Coast Guard cutter MIDGETT interdicted a 60 foot stateless self propelled semi-submersible (SPSS) vessel carrying over 14,000 pounds (approximately 7 metric tons) of cocaine valued at over \$196 million. A U.S. Navy Maritime Patrol Aircraft and the MIDGETT interdicted the SPSS approximately 400 nautical miles south of the Mexico-Guatemala border.

With unusually calm seas and good weather on scene, the Coast Guard was able to commence a boarding of the abandoned SPSS. Once on board, the Coast Guard team located 295 bales of cocaine in a huge forward compartment. As the boarding team unloaded the illegal cargo, which was needed for a drug trafficking prosecution, the SPSS became highly unstable and began to rapidly flood and sink by its stern. The Coast Guard boarding team escaped as the SPSS sank beneath them within a few minutes. The extraordinary evidence collection effort by the Coast Guard will enable the United States to prosecute the four Colombian smugglers on drug trafficking charges. Prosecutions like these are rare in SPSS cases because the scuttling tactics of the SPSS crews normally result in the complete destruction of all evidence.

This interdiction follows a daring nighttime boarding and seizure of another SPSS on September 12-13 in which the Coast Guard boarding team surprised the SPSS captain and crew under cover of darkness and were able to recover the SPSS after the captain first tried to drown the boarding team and then complied with orders to disengage the scuttling devices on his vessel. In that case, the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard recovered another 7 metric tons of cocaine and the four man crew faces prosecution in the United States. SPSS vessels are clearly proliferating and are on track to become the preferred conveyance for maritime drug traffickers.



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SPSS: RAPIDLY BECOMING THE PREFERRED METHOD FOR SMUGGLING COCAINE

DRAMATIC INCREASE IN SPSS USE BY DRUG TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATIONS BEGINNING IN FY-07

- 23 total SPSS events in 6 ½ years leading up to Sept 2007
- 62 total SPSS events in first 3 Quarters of FY-08 & 80 total events expected

SPSS NOW ACCOUNT FOR 32% OF ALL MARITIME COCAINE FLOW IN THE TRANSIT ZONE

- To date FY08: SPSS account for 355 MT of cocaine flow
- Projected FY09 of 80+ events / 480 MT+
- 2-4 SPSS departures each week
- Estimated 10+ SPSS departures between Mexican Navy seizure on July 16, 2008 and US seizures on September 13-17, 2008.

PROFILE OF AN SPSS

- ✓ Built primarily in FARC-controlled jungles of Colombia
- ✓ Stateless vessels
- ✓ 25-65 feet in length
- ✓ Speeds up to 13 knots
- ✓ 4-5 crewmembers
- ✓ Range up to 5000 NM with refueling 2500 NM without refueling
- ✓ Loads up to 10 metric tons with average of 3-6 metric tons
- ✓ Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA) have best detection track record
- ✓ SPSS designed to scuttle immediately upon counter-detection & no contraband recovery possible
- ✓ First made of wood and fiberglass, U.S. forces are now seeing advanced steel construction with sophisticated electronics to avoid law enforcement efforts



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Representative SPSS Cases



On **11 February 2008**, a U.S. patrol aircraft detected a 50-foot stateless SPSS approximately 80 nautical miles west of Buenaventura, CO. The four Colombian smugglers quickly flooded the vessel as soon as they observed U.S. forces approaching. The SPSS sank within minutes, but the Coast Guard was able to recover one bale of cocaine from the SPSS before it fully submerged. After the SPSS sank, another 58 bales of cocaine floated to the surface.

On **1 March 2008**, a U.S. patrol aircraft detected an SPSS 375 nautical miles west of the Galapagos Islands, operating with the decks awash with only the top of a raised conning tower above the water line. The four Colombian smugglers began to flood the vessel, increased speed, and abandoned the SPSS. The Coast Guard rescued the smugglers from the ocean while the SPSS sunk. The vessel sank so quickly that the Coast Guard was unable to recover any contraband from the hull. A previously initiated law enforcement investigation suggests that this SPSS vessel was carrying a multi-ton load of cocaine.

On **16 July 2008**, a U.S. patrol aircraft detected an SPSS in the vicinity the Gulf of Tehuantepec, MX, approximately 110 miles from the Mexican coast. The Mexican Navy responded to the sighting by deploying a helicopter with a Mexican Special Forces team that fast-roped onto the SPSS and seized it. Mexican forces apprehended the four Colombians, who reported they did not sink the vessel because they did not see a ship nearby and believed they would drown if they flooded their boat. Mexican forces recovered over 6 tons of cocaine.





URGENT NEED FOR LEGISLATION TO COUNTER DANGEROUS NATIONAL SECURITY THREAT

If operation of and embarkation in an SPSS were illegal, U.S. interdiction forces and U.S. Attorneys would have the necessary legal tools to combat the SPSS threat even in the absence of recovered drugs or other contraband. Criminalizing the operation of STATELESS SPSS vessels on international voyages would improve officer safety, deter the use of these inherently dangerous vessels, and facilitate effective prosecution of criminals involved in this treacherous and emerging trend. The penalty for any SPSS offense should be sufficiently strong to deter use and encourage cooperation by those interdicted at sea. Because the desired legislation is limited to stateless SPSS and submarines on international voyages, the law would not affect legitimate business users and law abiding hobbyists.

SELF-PROPELLED SEMI-SUBMERSIBLES:

Legislative Action as of September 17, 2008



- The Administration transmitted the SPSS proposal as an addendum to the combined DHS statement presented at the **March 11, 2008** hearing before the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security.
- SPSS legislation was introduced as amendment to the CG Authorization Bill (H.R. 2830) that passed on **April 24** with 408 votes.
- Representatives Lungren and Poe introduced identical stand-alone legislation in the House on **June 18** (H.R. 6295).
- Senators Lautenberg and Smith introduced, with Senators Cantwell and Snowe cosponsoring, stand-alone SPSS legislation in the Senate on **June 25** (S. 3198).
- On **July 28**, Senator Biden introduced a stand-alone title 18 anti-SPSS provision (S. 3351), which was referred to the Senate Commerce, Science, and Technology Committee.
- On **July 29**, the House passed HR 6295, a stand-alone title 18 anti-SPSS provision nearly identical to S. 3351, under suspension of the rules and transmitted it to the Senate.



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